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DEPART FOR WHA/CAR JROSHOLT

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SUBJECT: FIVE HOURS WELL-SPENT IN SURINAME:
SHANNON/STAVRIDIS MARCH 28 WHIRLWIND VISIT HIGHLIGHTS
BILATERAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

REF: PARAMARIBO 101

¶1. (U) SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES FROM SHANNON/STAVRIDIS

FIVE-HOUR VISIT: On March 28, WHA Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon and SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral Jim Stavridis spent five hours on the ground in Suriname. Together they met with President Runaldo Ronald Venetiaan (paras 2-4) and conducted a well-received press conference at the airport just prior to their departure. Separately A/S Shannon met with Foreign Minister Lygia Kraag-Keteldijk (paras 5-7), and visited the Embassy for a town hall meeting and a country team briefing. Meanwhile, Admiral Stavridis met with Defense Minister Ivan Fernald and Commander of the Armed Forces Colonel Ernst Mercuur. Throughout, the visit focused on partnership-building and regional integration. For Suriname, the traditional "misfit" of the Western Hemisphere (neither British/French like most of the Caribbean, nor Spanish/Portuguese like most of South and Central America), the fact that the USG's highest-ranking diplomat for the Western Hemisphere had come to visit at all, along with four-star Admiral Stavridis, was noteworthy proof that the USG is committed to even the smallest countries in the region. END SUMMARY.

President Venetiaan Highlights Significance of High-Ranking U.S. Diplomatic Visit

¶2. (U) Flanked by his Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, President Venetiaan invited his American visitors to start the meeting. Thus prompted, A/S Shannon said that his visit, together with Admiral Stavridis, underscored the importance to the USG of bilateral and regional partnerships.

The visit, Shannon noted, was a followup to the USG's 2007 Conference on the Caribbean (which Venetiaan did not attend).

Admiral Stavridis agreed, noting that the State/SouthCom collaboration deepens the USG partnership with the GOS and its Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs. Stavridis said that the October 2007 visit to Suriname of the USN hospital ship "Comfort" was successful, thanks in good measure to GOS support. He added that "Beyond the Horizons," SOUTHCOM's next big humanitarian project for Suriname, would start later in 2008, providing more opportunities for joint cooperation. Stavridis noted that he and Shannon also sought to address security issues related to drugs, crime, and transnational threats.

¶3. (SBU) In response, President Venetiaan commented that Suriname had already seen visits from the U.S. military and

the Secretary of Defense. However, this visit marked the first time that an Assistant Secretary of State had been to Suriname. The President noted Shannon's comments on the Conference on the Caribbean, and urged State to remain focused on commitments made and what still needed to be achieved, singling out the need for HIV/AIDS funding. In an apparent reference to HIV/AIDS assistance provided to neighboring Guyana, Venetiaan said, "At times, HIV only understands English. We face a problem to make it clear that AIDS is a scourge here." Regarding cross-border crime, the President noted that combatting the trafficking in small weapons and drugs was a possible area for cooperation between our militaries and governments. Also of interest are education, health care, and culture. Suriname's development plan could benefit from U.S. experience in promoting development, specifically in technology transfer, carbon-based energy sources, hydropower, bio-fuels, and nuclear energy (which Venetiaan flagged as a sensitive issue). The President also suggested that perhaps the U.S. could provide its outside perspective on Suriname, "evaluat(ing) us better than ourselves. ... collaboration with others can help us do better." On larger issues, Venetiaan noted that Suriname and the U.S. are close, yet far apart on issues ranging from geography to politics to economics. Because the Surinamese dollar is linked to the U.S. dollar, the President said that the GOS follows (economic developments in) the U.S. with great interest. Venetiaan concluded by reiterating his satisfaction that A/S Shannon had taken the time to visit, asserting that it was important to give assurances to the Caribbean that the USG maintains its interest in the region. The President acknowledged that Suriname, "... had governments that have been on the left or right. Notwithstanding our relations with 'other countries' (alluding to Cuba, Venezuela, and

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perhaps China), the friendship with the U.S. still remains."

¶4. (SBU) A/S Shannon agreed that there was potential for collaboration in many areas. As the USG engages with CARICOM, no country should be left behind. The GOS faces challenges on development and security issues, and the USG wants to be helpful. HIV/AIDS is an important point; the USG objective is to expand PEPFAR, which has been successful in Guyana. Shannon promised to convey Venetiaan's interest back to Washington, assuring the President that State meets regularly with Caribbean ambassadors, including Suriname's, to track progress on the Caribbean Conference agenda. Shannon said that he hoped the Caribbean Conference was only the first in a series of meetings on a long-term commitment. The Assistant Secretary assured Venetiaan that the USG understands the primary goal of developing nations is to obtain resources and assistance, and that the USG's objective is not to criticize, but to look for ways to highlight the positive.

Foreign Minister Kraag-Keteldijk Focuses on Development,
CARICOM

¶5. (SBU) Once the meeting with President Venetiaan concluded, Minister Kraag-Keteldijk hurried off to prepare to greet A/S Shannon at the Foreign Ministry. In her subsequent half-hour bilateral with the Assistant Secretary, Kraag-Keteldijk appeared warmer and more engaged than Post has (arguably) ever seen her, testament to Surinamese receptivity to Shannon's message of collaboration and partnership. Describing Suriname as a small country with a small economy, unable to develop on its own, Kraag-Keteldijk said that the U.S. is an historic development partner for Suriname, dating from pre-independence (1975), and that the GOS is pleased with its relationships in the region, including with the United States. The GOS international agenda includes security, broadly stated to include poverty, health, and environmental security. Changing topics, the

Minister flagged issues surrounding the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Article 98 as a problem from the GOS.

¶6. (SBU) Maintaining his conciliatory stance, A/S Shannon assured the Foreign Minister that he respected the GOS position on the ICC, and that it was not the USG intent to impose its positions on other sovereign states. International relations were not based on single issues; the larger relationship was important. Shannon explained that Secretary Rice favors a positive agenda for the region, based

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on common values and common economic objectives. Differences of opinion between sovereign states should not be avoided, but managed. Issues of mutual interest have a transnational quality. Consequently the USG has developed a transnational focus on security with an emphasis on cross-border crime but also including threats caused by natural disaster and environmental degradation. With respect to security in the region, Shannon noted the upcoming (April 4) security meeting in Trinidad of Caribbean Heads of Government (HOGs), stating that the USG wants to partner with the HOGs in the aftermath of that meeting. (Note: due to the tragedy of the April 3 airplane crash in Suriname, President Venetiaan did not attend the April 4 meeting.)

¶7. (SBU) Continuing on the issue of regional integration, Shannon noted that, while in Guyana, he met with the CARICOM secretariat. Believing the USG to be well-positioned to work

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together with CARICOM nations individually as well as collectively, Shannon committed to establishing a mechanism in Washington to meet with Caribbean ambassadors, noting that he himself would meet with the ambassadors from Guyana, Barbados, and Suriname upon his return to the U.S. The Assistant Secretary stated that he also would ask Secretary Rice to meet with Caribbean foreign ministers to review progress on achieving the objectives of the Conference on the Caribbean. Although acknowledging the continued importance of bilateral relations, Shannon noted that much of the work in the Caribbean has a regional focus, and that deepening regional integration can help Caribbean nations to achieve their goals. Kraag-Keteldijk agreed, but also noted that regional integration into bodies such as CARICOM also carries risks for small countries such as Suriname. Referring to the CARICOM single market initiative, the Minister noted that the implementation phase had been pushed back from 2008 to 2014,

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alluding to Surinamese private sector concerns over inability to compete with goods from more economically powerful CARICOM member states. Despite the challenges, Minister Kraag-Keteldijk conceded that Suriname has no choice but to join forces with regional bodies such as CARICOM. A/S Shannon agreed, stating that the USG is a firm believer in integration; the time is ripe for integration in the Western Hemisphere, where it would soon be clear what works and what does not. As nations of the Americas pursue this route, Shannon suggested that they consider sharing their experiences in ways that could be helpful to others (e.g., Arab nations).

Visit of Assistant Secretary Shannon and Admiral Stavridis Demonstrated USG Commitment to Suriname, and to the Region

¶8. (U) Although only hours-long, the Shannon/Stavridis visit generated considerable attention, including extensive front-page media coverage. Of particular significance to the GOS, as both President Venetiaan and Minister Kraag-Keteldijk made a point to note, was the fact that the visit included a high-ranking State Department official (A/S Shannon). Without minimizing the importance of SouthCom Commander Admiral Stavridis' visit, GOS officials made clear that it is

customary for the U.S. military to pay attention to Suriname.

It is not customary for Suriname to receive high-level USG visitors from Departments other than Defense. As such, the March 28 visit contributed substantially to Post's primary Mission Strategic Goal: Mutual U.S./Suriname appreciation and respect contributing to a more effective partnership.

SCHREIBER HUGHES